

CHAPTER 13

A silent Heaven! Yes, but it is not the silence of callous indifference or helpless weakness. It is the silence of a great sabbatic rest, the silence of a peace which is absolute and profound--a silence which is the public pledge and proof that the way is open for the guiltiest of mankind to draw near to God. When faith murmurs, and unbelief revolts, and men challenge the Supreme to break that silence and declare Himself, how little do they realize what the challenge means! It means the withdrawal of the amnesty; it means the end of the reign of grace; it means the closing of the day of mercy and the dawning of the day of wrath.

Among the statements which distressed the orthodox in the late Professor Tyndall's famous Birmingham address on "Science and Man" was his reference to the Herald Angels' song. "Look to the East at the present moment" (he exclaimed) "as a comment on the promise of peace on earth and goodwill towards men. The promise is a dream ruined by the experience of eighteen centuries, and in that ruin is involved the claim of the 'heavenly host' to prophetic vision." But the angels' song was not a promise. Still less was it a prophecy. That anthem of praise was a Divine proclamation. The time was not yet when God could enforce peace between man and man; but grace "came by Jesus Christ," and with that advent peace and goodwill became the attitude of God to men. And this "on earth," even in the midst of their sorrows and their sins. "He came and preached good tidings of peace" (Eph. 2:17, R.V. *margin*). And "he who has ears to hear" can catch the echo of that voice as it still vibrates in our air. If God is silent now, it is because Heaven has come down to earth, the climax of Divine revelation has been reached, there is no reserve of mercy yet to be unfolded. He has spoken His last word of love and grace, and when next He breaks the silence it will be to let loose the judgments which shall yet engulf a world that has rejected Christ. For "our God shall come and shall *not* keep silence" (Psa. 50:3).

A silent Heaven is a part of the mystery of God; but Holy Writ declares that a day is fixed in the Divine chronology when "the mystery of God shall be finished" (Rev. 10:7). And when that day breaks, the heavenly host shall again be heard proclaiming that "The sovereignty of the world¹ is become our Lord's and His Christ's, and He shall reign forever and ever." And at this signal the wonderful beings that sit on thrones around the throne of God shall raise the anthem, "We give Thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which are, and was, and are to come, because Thou has taken to Thee Thy great power, and has reigned. And the nations were angry and Thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead that they should be judged, and that Thou should give reward to Thy servants the prophets and to the saints and them that fear Thy name, small and great, and should destroy them that destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:15-18). Then at last He will assume the power that even now is His by right, and openly reward the good and put down the evil. In a word, He will do then what men think He ought to do now and always. And if He delays to do this, it is not that He is "slack concerning His promise." God's own "apology" for His inaction is that He is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish,

1 η βασιλεια του κοσμου (Rev. 11:15).

but that all should come to repentance" (2 Pet. 3:9).

Through all the ages until Christ came, the course of human history was an unanswered indictment by which every attribute of God was seemingly discredited. The Divine power and wisdom and righteousness and love were all brought into question. But the advent of Christ was God's full and final revelation of Himself to man. There are mysteries, no doubt, which still remain unsolved, but they are mysteries which lie beyond the horizon of our world. First among these is the origin of evil. Not the Eden fall, but the fall of that wonderful Being to whose "devices" the Eden fall was due. Why did God permit the first and noblest of His creatures to turn devil? But of all the questions which immediately concern us, there is not one which the Cross of Christ has left unanswered. Men point to the sad incidents of human life on earth, and they ask "Where is the love of God?" God points to that Cross as the unreserved manifestation of love so inconceivably infinite as to answer every challenge and silence all doubt forever.² And that Cross is not merely the public proof of what God has accomplished; it is the earnest of all that He has promised. The crowning mystery of God is Christ, for in Him "are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden" (Col. 2:2,3, R.V.). And those hidden treasures are yet to be unfolded. It is the Divine purpose to "gather together in one all things in Christ" (Eph. 1:10). Sin has broken the harmony of creation, but that harmony shall yet be restored by the supremacy of our now despised and rejected Lord. In the very name of His humiliation every knee in heaven and on earth and in the underworld shall bow before Him, and every tongue shall confess that He is Lord (Phil. 2:10).

And to believe in Christ is to own His Lordship *now*. Hence the promise, "If you shall confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and shall believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you shall be saved."³ The sinner who thus believes in Christ anticipates now and here the realization of the supreme purpose of God, and he is absolutely and forever saved.

It was in the power of these truths that the martyrs lived and died. Here was the secret of their triumph--not "the general sense of Scripture corrected in the light of reason and conscience"; not the insolent pretensions of priestcraft, degrading to everyone who tolerates them. With hearts awed by the fear of God, garrisoned by the peace of God, and exulting in the love of God shed abroad there by the Divine Spirit, they stood for the truth against priests and princes combined, and daring to be called heretics they were faithful to their Lord in life and in death.

Heaven was as silent then as it is now. No sights were seen, no voice was heard to make

2 Anything which is manifest is of course raised out of the sphere of doubt or question; and God declares that in the Cross of Christ His grace and kindness and love have been *manifested* (Tit. 2:11, 3:4; 1 John 4:9). But ignoring the stupendous fact that for our sakes, He "spared not His own Son," men seek to put Him upon proof of His love; and the test is whether He complies with some specific appeal urged in the petulance of present need or sorrow.

3 Rom. 10:9 (R.V.). The true Buddhist will declare himself by the way in which he names his master, never omitting some title expressive of his reverence for him. And the true Christian will declare himself in the same way. If a man habitually writes or speaks about "Jesus," we may be sure, whatever his creed may be, that he is a Socinian at heart. "That Jesus Christ is LORD" is the special testimony of Christianity, and the Christian will not forget it even in his words.

their persecutors pause. No signs were witnessed to give proof that God was with them as they lay upon the rack or gave up their life-breath at the stake. But with their spiritual vision focused upon Christ, the unseen realities of heaven filled their hearts as they passed from a world that was not worthy of them to the home that God has prepared for them that love Him. But with us, the degenerate sons of a degenerate age, faith falters beneath the strain of the petty trials of our life. And while He is saying "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee," our murmurs drown His voice. And though professing to be "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," our petulance and unbelief put from us the infinite compassions of God. "*They* endured as seeing Him who is invisible"; *we* can see nothing but our troubles and our sorrows, which loom the greater because viewed through tears of selfish grief that blind our eyes to the glories of eternity.

The dispensation of law and covenant and promise--the distinctive privileges of the favored people--was marked by the public display of Divine power upon earth. But the reign of grace has its correlative in the life of faith. Ours is the higher privilege, the greater blessedness of those "who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29). And walking by faith is the antithesis of walking by sight. If "signs and wonders" were vouchsafed [granted] to us, as in Pentecostal days, faith would sink to a lower level, and the whole standard and character of the discipline of Christian life would be changed.⁴ The sufferings of Paul denote a higher faith than "the mighty deeds" of his earlier ministry. Not until miracles had ceased, and he had entered on the path of faith as we now tread it, was it revealed to him that his life was to be "a pattern to them who should afterwards believe" (1 Tim. 1:16).

And what a life it was! Here is the amazing record:

"Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day have I been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by my own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Cor. 11:24-27).

And all this not only without a murmur, but with a heart exulting in God. Instead of grumbling at his infirmities, he made a boast of them. Instead of repining at his persecutions, he learned to take pleasure in them.⁵ Not vainly nor morbidly, but "for Christ's sake," his Master and Lord, for whom he declared "he had suffered the loss of all things." Reviewing all his privations and sufferings, he describes them as "light affliction

4 See Appendix, Note X.

5 Here is an ascending scale of experience:

"Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He in anger shut up His tender mercies?" (Psa. 77:9).

"I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou did it" (Psa. 39:9).

"I have learned in whatsoever state I am therewith to be content" (Phil. 4:11).

"Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities...I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake" (2Cor. 12:9,10).

which is for the moment, working for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory," and he adds, "while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17,18).

How different is this from the experience described in the opening chapter! There, it is a case of those who seeing nothing beyond the events and circumstances of their life turn away from God with hardened and embittered hearts. But the sons of faith look away from the fierce waves and threatening storm clouds, for well they know that

*"Above the voice of many waters,
The mighty breakers of the sea,
The Lord on high is mighty."⁶*

And thus, filled with glad thoughts of the home beyond and of the glory to which He is calling them, they can rejoice in Him even though in heaviness in manifold trials, for the proof of their faith is precious (1 Pet. 1:6,7).

Men understand and appreciate the asceticisms of religion--"will-worship, and humility, and severity to the body"--penances and ordinances which are "after the precepts and doctrines of men" (Col. 2:23). But these have nothing in common with the life of faith. They are paths by which men delude themselves in vain efforts to reach the Cross. But it is at the Cross itself that the life of faith begins. And the spiritual miracles of that life are more wonderful than any which merely controlled or suspended the operation of natural laws. Greatest of them all is the miracle of the new birth by the Spirit of God, with its outward side of conversion from a life of selfishness or sin to a life of consecrated service. And those who have experienced it can say in the words of Holy Writ, "We know that the Son of God is come, and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true" (1 John 5:20). And carrying the truth to others, they find it produces the same results which they themselves have proved. And this not merely in isolated cases or in favoring circumstances. During recent years many who have publicly pledged their belief that the Bible is true,⁷ and who are subsidized to teach that it is Divine, have been laboring to prove that it is unreliable and human--and these years have been precisely those in which Christian men have carried it to some of the most degraded races of the heathen world, with results that surpass all previous records, giving overwhelming proof of its Divine character and mission.

To men like these there is a sense in which Heaven is *not* silent. The science of today has taught us that there are rays of light, till now unknown, which can penetrate the densest substances. But these rays can only be evolved when the atmosphere of earth has been excluded. And such wonders have their counterpart in the spiritual sphere. Those who

6 Psa. 93:4 (R.V. revised). The word *voice* is in the plural, but it is obviously the Hebrew *poetical* plural; not several voices, but "the *great* voice").

7 Every candidate for ordination must publicly declare, in reply to the Bishop, that he "unfeignedly believes all the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." Whether such a pledge ought to be required, I will not discuss. The fact remains. And this being so, when *clergymen* set themselves to discredit the Bible, the primary question suggested concerns their own honesty. Has the Church a lower standard of morality than the Clubs?

can thus escape from the influence of earth and rise above the seen and temporal, have eyes to see and ears to hear the sights and sounds of another world; and with united voice they testify that God is with His people and that His Word is true.

And behind these men are tens of thousands of Christians at home, including not a few of the greatest theologians and thinkers and scholars of the age, who share their beliefs and rejoice in their triumphs. Not that the question "What is truth?" can be settled by a *plebiscite*⁸! For truth has always been in a minority. But there is no element of cohesion in error. Among the children of error, there is no bond of unity save such as depends on common hostility to truth. One generation kills the prophets, another builds their sepulchres. Those who shed the martyrs' blood are repudiated and condemned by their successors and representatives today. But the children of truth in every age are one. Great is the "cloud of witnesses" encompassing us round--the righteous dead of all the ages past. And when our race shall have been run, we too in time shall pass from the arena to join the mighty throng until at last, their ranks complete, the ever-swelling host shall stand a countless multitude before the throne of God.

* * * * *

What a success this book might have been had it but fulfilled the promise of its earlier pages! If only it had gone on to enforce the revolt against faith suggested in the opening chapter, then indeed it would have been "reviewed" in the newspapers and "called for" at the libraries. But while skeptical attacks upon the Bible rank with general literature,⁹ any defense of it which appeals to its deeper teaching is deemed unsuited for notice in the secular press. And so it comes about that everything which unbelief has to urge is brought prominently before the public, but the vast majority of people never hear of a book which is distinctly Christian.

Religion and Skepticism are rival competitors for popular favor. And yet there are many who, though conscious of longings too deep to be satisfied by mere religion, make choice of religion because they know of no other refuge from unbelief. And there are others again who, "with too much knowledge for the skeptic's side," drift into skepticism in their recoil from priestcraft.¹⁰ To some such, perchance, these pages may suggest a better way; for Christianity delivers us not only from skepticism on the one hand, but from superstition on the other.

And to not a few this volume may be welcome as affording a clue to pressing difficulties which perplex and distress the thoughtful. Infidelity trades upon the silence of Heaven, the inaction of the Supreme. If there be a God, almighty and all-good, why does He not use His power and give proof of His goodness in the way men choose to expect of Him? The answer usually offered by the Christian apologist fails either to silence the opponent or to satisfy the believer. And rightly so, for it is lacking not only in cogency but in

8 A vote in which a population exercises the right of national self-determination.

9 Appendix, Note XI.

10 The lives of the Newmans afford an apt illustration. Both made shipwreck of their faith--the one in religion, the other in infidelity. The "Apologia" and the "Phases of Faith" are among the saddest of books.

sympathy. The God of the Bible is infinite both in power and in compassion; and in other ages His people had public proof of this. Why, then, is He so silent?

The question is not why He does not *always* declare Himself, but why He *never* does so. If, as already urged, even whole generations passed away without experiencing any direct manifestation of Divine power on earth, then His people in the presence of some crushing sorrow or some hideous wrong might well exclaim with Gideon long ago, "If the Lord be with us, why then is all this befallen us? and where are all His miracles which our fathers told us of?" (Judg. 6:13.) But what concerns us is the fact that throughout the entire course of this Christian dispensation since Pentecostal times, "the finger of God" (Luke 11:20) has never been openly at work upon earth; never once has a public miracle been witnessed--"a single public event to compel belief that there is a God at all!" Are we left to grope in darkness for the answer? Does revelation throw no light upon it? To suggest the solution of this mystery, these pages have been written. It now remains but to recapitulate the argument they offer.

An appeal to "the Christian miracles," it has been urged, so far from solving the mystery serves only to intensify it. The purpose of the miracles, moreover, was to accredit the Messiah to Israel and not, as generally supposed, to accredit Christianity to the heathen. And therefore, as Scripture plainly indicates, they continued so long as the testimony was addressed to the Jew but ceased when, the Jew being set aside, the gospel went out to the Gentile world.

But the crisis which deprived the favored nation of its vantage-ground of privilege was made the occasion of a new revelation to mankind. Israel's fall was "the reconciliation of the world" (Rom. 11:15). God assumed a new attitude toward men. Mercy there had always been for Gentiles, for the diligent seeker after God never sought Him in vain.¹¹ But Christianity goes infinitely beyond this. It is the realization of the change foreshadowed by the prophetic words, "I was found of them that *sought Me not*; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after Me" (Rom. 10:20). It is not that God will give heed to the cry of the true penitent who entreats for mercy, for this He ever did; but that He Himself is entreating even the impenitent to turn to Him. He is beseeching men to be reconciled (2 Cor. 5:20). It is not that there is mercy for *some* men, but that God has now made a public declaration of His grace, "salvation-bringing to ALL men."¹² Grace is on the throne, reigning through righteousness unto eternal life (Rom. 5:21).

But it is plain matter of fact that before this great characteristic truth of Christianity was revealed, there was immediate Divine intervention upon earth. In a word, there were miracles; whereas after this truth was revealed, they ceased. The era of the reign of grace is precisely the era of the silence of God. To grace, therefore, we look to explain the silence. Christianity is the supreme and final revelation of the Divine "kindness and love-toward-man."¹³ Therefore when God again declares Himself, it can only be in wrath, and wrath must await "the day of wrath" (Rom. 2:5).

¹¹ Acts 17:27; Heb. 11:6; Rom. 2:7. And see specially Acts 10:34,35.

¹² σωτηριος πασιν ανθρωποις (Titus 2:11).

¹³ φιλανθρωπια (Titus 3:4).

Not that human government has lost its Divine sanction, for "the powers that be are ordained of God" (Rom. 13:1). Nor yet that the moral government of the world is in abeyance; the laws of nature are relentlessly enforced.¹⁴ But in this higher sphere there is neither court nor constable empowered to deal with the sins of men; for He to whom alone belongs the high prerogative of judgment is now enthroned as SAVIOR. God is no longer "imputing their trespasses" to men.¹⁵ From the throne of the Divine Majesty there has gone forth the proclamation of pardon and peace, and this without condition or reserve. And now a silent Heaven gives continuing proof that this great amnesty is still in force, and that the guiltiest of men may turn to God and find forgiveness of sins and eternal life. God is silent because He has spoken His last word of mercy and love, and judgment must await the "day of judgment"--there can be no place for it in this "day of grace."¹⁶

To many all this will seem the merest mysticism. Others, again, will see no meaning in it whatsoever. For to them the ministry and death of Christ are but a splendid episode which has raised humanity to a higher level than it ever before attained. For such, indeed, the problem of this book has no significance.¹⁷ Having but a timid belief in the supernatural, the absence of miracles excites in them neither wonder nor distress. But there are not a few, happily, who have learned to think of Calvary, not as an upward step in the inevitable progress of the race toward the goal of its high destiny, but as a tremendous crisis which has brought man's probation to an end, leaving him absolutely dependent upon Divine grace, or, if he rejects the proffered mercy, shutting him up to judgment. And such will form a worthier estimate of the clue here offered to the mystery of a silent Heaven.

14 As an infidel writer has somewhere said, "Nature knows nothing of any such foolery as 'forgiveness of sins.'"

15 2 Cor. 5:19. See Chapter 10 and Appendix Note VIII.

16 In proportion to our appreciation of the Christian revelation will be our appreciation of the argument that God cannot now intervene, or declare Himself, directly and openly. But this leaves unanswered the difficulty that He so often fails to intervene *indirectly* on behalf of His own people. This was dealt with earlier in this chapter. The life of faith has always been a life of trial, and it is so specially in this dispensation of a silent Heaven. But it is our joy to know that our Divine Lord "was in all points tempted like as we are, apart from sin" (Heb. 4:15). The statement seems to involve a contradiction, for how could He be tempted as we are tempted if, as the added words (*χωρίς αμαρτίας*) imply, "throughout these temptations, in their origin, in their process, in their result, sin had nothing in Him; He was free and separate from it"? (Alford). The explanation will be found in what has here been unfolded (Chap. 11) respecting Satanic temptations as primarily designed to destroy our confidence in God. The thirty years before our Lord entered on His public ministry, spent in enforced inaction in the midst of abounding sorrow and evil and wrong, must have been to Him a living martyrdom, the Tempter ever taunting Him with the seeming apathy of God. And when we read that "He *suffered* being tempted" (Heb. 2:18), we can realize how truly He was human, and how deep and real was His humiliation.

17 Such have been precisely the criticisms this volume has evoked. One of the chief organs of cultured thought in England describes it as "a book full of religious mysticism." And one of the leading press organs of the "Sadducees," while speaking in flattering terms of the way in which the problem of the book is stated, can see nothing in the proposed solution of it. So it ever was. To the Jew the gospel of Christ was an offense because it set aside religion; to the cultured Greek it was foolishness because it ignored what he was pleased to call wisdom. The "philosopher" was thinking of evolution and the upward progress of humanity, but the gospel spoke to him of grace that would pardon his sins and of judgment to come. If the leaders of the school of thought and teaching here alluded to could only be brought to apprehend the truth this volume contains, their whole position and testimony would be changed. But their literature will be searched for it in vain. Such a statement is easily made, but if untrue it can as easily be answered; let the book be cited which refutes it.